MTRS Basic Electronic Reporting Tool

BERT User Guide

Contents

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MTRS
MASSACHUSETTS TEACHERS'
RETIREMENT SYSTEM

JULY 2008

PART 1

Getting started

Introduction

Originally released in April 2007 and updated in June 2008, our Basic Electronic Reporting Tool (BERT) is designed to provide all school districts with an easy-to-use retirement deduction reporting tool that requires less data entry, features user-friendly input screens and is fully compliant with our employer reporting requirements (807 CMR 5.00).

Using the latest release of BERT, you—school district officials—can:

- **create** your monthly deduction report database right on your desktop computer,

- **create, change** and **delete** employees' records as needed,

- **test** your output file for common reporting errors, and correct them, **before** you submit your report to the MTRS, and

- **export** your monthly deduction report to your local hard drive, diskette, CD and/or other media.

You will still need to send us your file on diskette or CD, along with your payment check and MTRS Deduction Submittal Sheet (pdf; 1 page). While BERT provides an up-to-date reporting tool, we are still not able to accept your deduction reports through electronic transmission—although we are working toward that goal. For additional information and where to send your reports, please see our website at **mass.gov/mtrs > Employers.**

Which districts can (or should) use BERT

We strongly encourage **ALL** districts to use BERT, as it allows you to review your monthly reports **BEFORE** submitting them for processing. As described under **Export an error report** (page 22), BERT will quickly and clearly identify the most common reporting errors, allowing you to correct them prior to your submittal.

Note
BERT is a reporting tool and by providing BERT, the MTRS does not assume the responsibility for the accuracy of your data.

Please be careful when entering data and proofread your entries to ensure the accuracy of your input.

User tip
The MTRS recommends that you keep electronic copies of your deduction reports for **at least 24 months** in the event that we—or you—find that the data needs to be reevaluated or reproduced.

Additionally, BERT is especially helpful to districts that:

■ need a temporary software solution when their primary system fails or is not available (for example, during a software upgrade),

■ need an application that will enable them to submit data corrections, or

■ are newly created.

Installing BERT 2.0

BERT is a Microsoft Access application. In order to run BERT, you must have Microsoft Access 2000 or later installed on your PC.

If you have any problems installing BERT, or if you have any questions about using the program, please:

■ contact your MTRS Employer Services Representative,

■ call the Employer Services helpline at 617-679-6895, or

■ send an e-mail to **bertsupport@trb.state.ma.us.**

To install BERT

1) On our BERT web page, next to DOWNLOAD, click on the **BERT** link.

Note to Mac users
Since Microsoft Access is not available in a Mac-compatible version, you will not be able to use BERT unless you have both the PC-version of Access **and** Virtual PC installed on your Mac.

Note
This process does not have to be repeated unless a new version of BERT is downloaded.

2) BERT's installation program is an executable file, so you may receive a warning from your security software. Please click **Run** to continue the installation process.


3) Some security programs may even give you a second warning, but please be assured that BERT is a safe program to install. If the following message appears, please click **Run** again.

4) When BERT's self-extracting message box appears, please click the **Browse…** button to select the network folder in which you would like to install BERT. We recommend that you save your file on a secure network folder whenever possible so your file will be safe and can be backed up by your IT department.
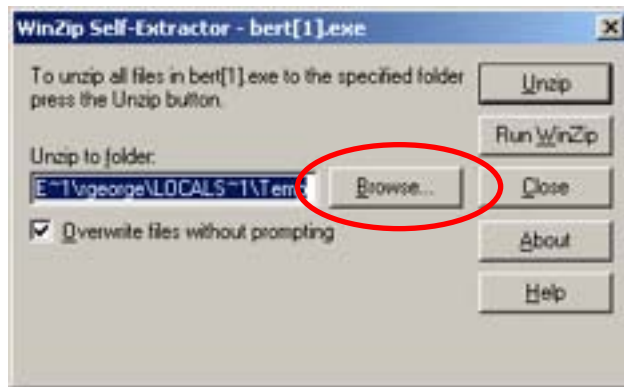

5) A browser window will appear for you to choose where to save the application. Save the file to the computer or network drive of your choice. Again, we recommend that you save the file on a secure network folder.
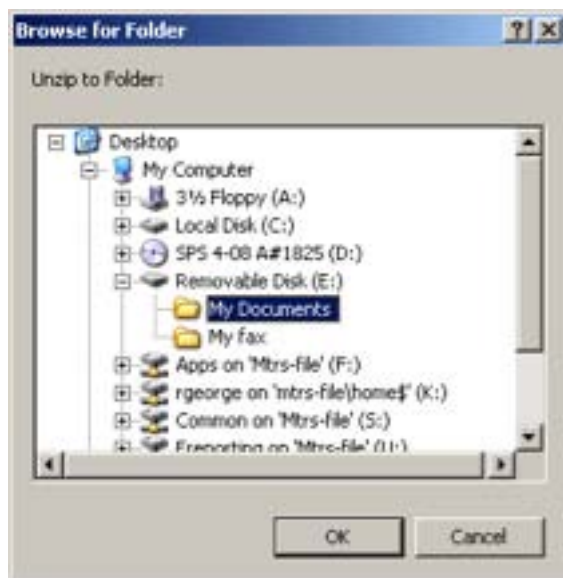
6) Once you have selected your drive, click on **Unzip** to install BERT on the drive you selected.
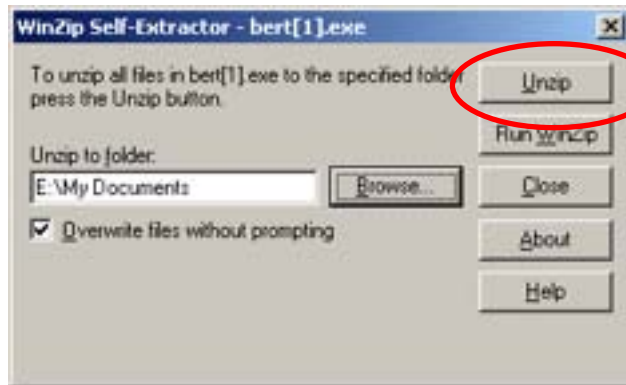
7) When BERT has been successfully installed, you should receive a confirmation message similar to the message below. Please click **OK**.
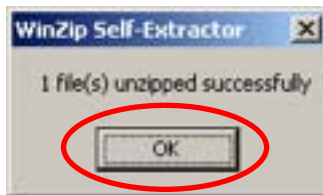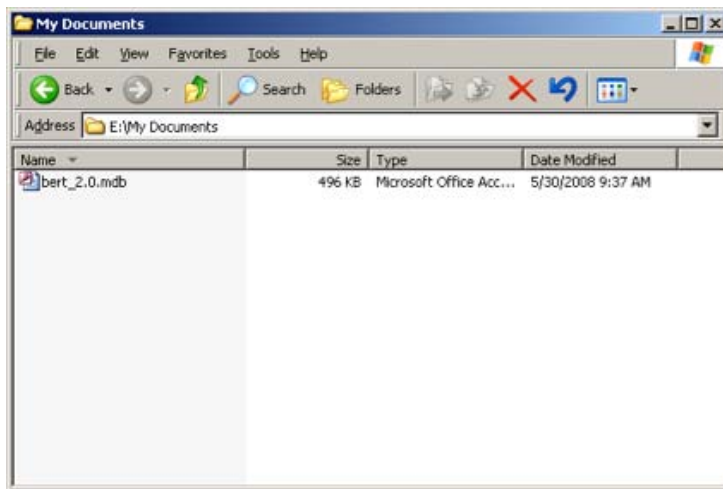

8) Now that you have installed BERT, exit the installer by clicking **Close** on the Self Extractor.

9) Next, navigate to the network drive where you installed BERT in order to use it.

User tip: Create a desktop shortcut to BERT

To create a shortcut to the BERT program on your desktop, right-click on the program in this view, and choose "send to" then "desktop (shortcut)."

The Main screen of your new BERT program should look like this:
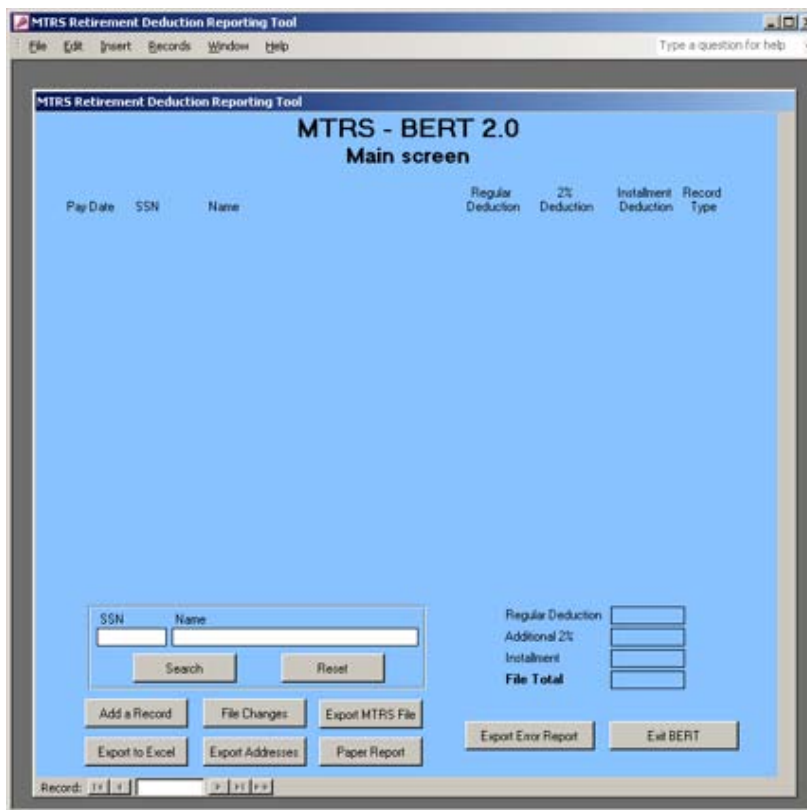
Thank you for installing BERT. If you have any questions about installation or use, please do not hesitate to contact your MTRS district representative.

Eliminating unnecessary pop-up messages

Access will cause a series of pop-up messages to appear when you are using BERT. To avoid these recurring messages every time you run the program, follow the steps outlined below for your version of Access:
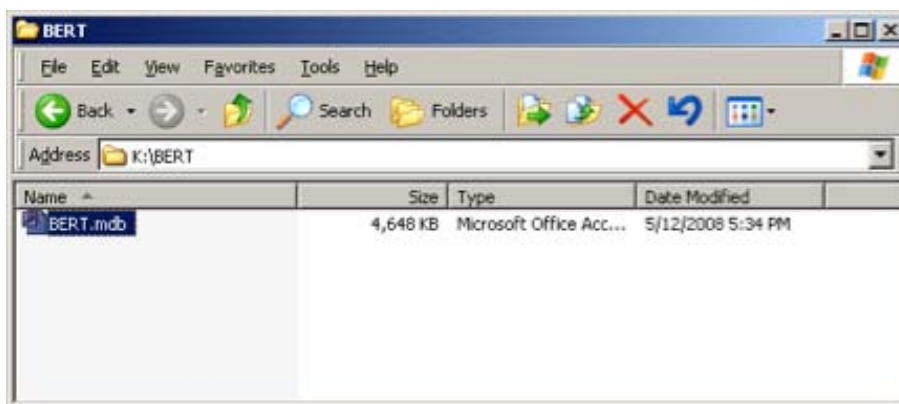
- Pre-Access 2007 (Access 2000, 2003 or before)
- Access 2007

For Pre-Access 2007 users

1) Open **Windows** (*not* Internet) **Explorer** and select the folder where you have stored BERT.
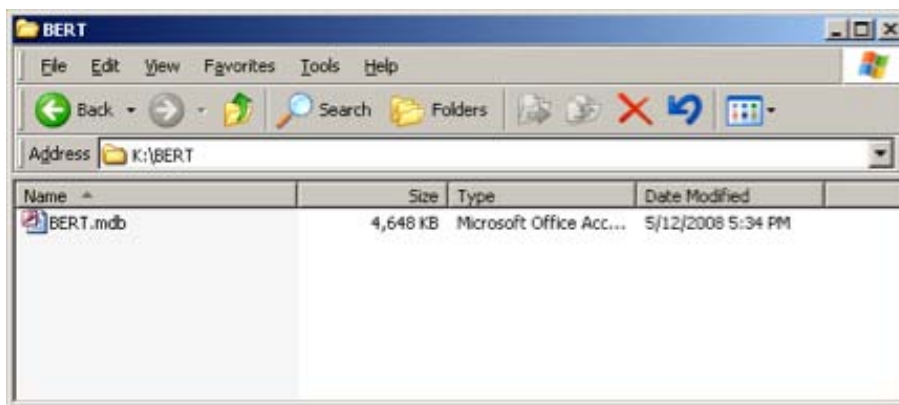
2) Once you are in the folder, use the up and down arrow keys to highlight BERT in the folder. Next, **while holding the Shift** key, click on the BERT program. **Do not let go of the Shift key until you are instructed to do so in a later step.**

3) The BERT tool should open in a view similar to this. Click the **Tools** option in the menu bar at the top of the page and select **Options.** Once you have accessed the database window below, you may let go of the **Shift** key.
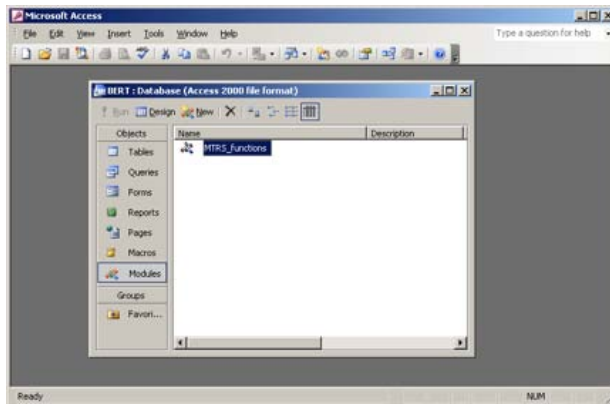
4) Click on the **Edit/Find** tab, and uncheck the three boxes in the **Confirm** box circled in the illustration below. Next, click **Apply,** then **OK.**
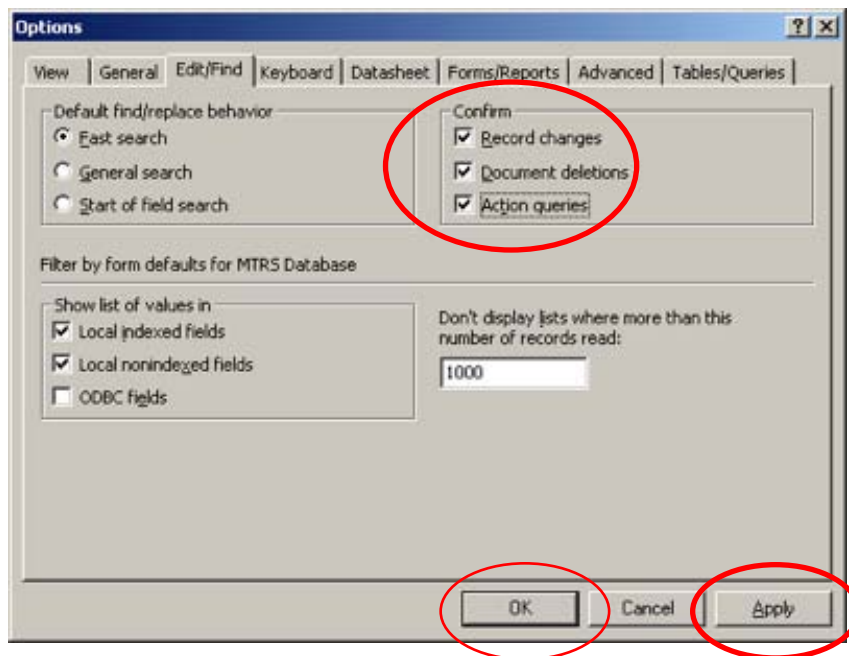
5) When the Database window below appears, close it (click on the **X** in the upper right corner).
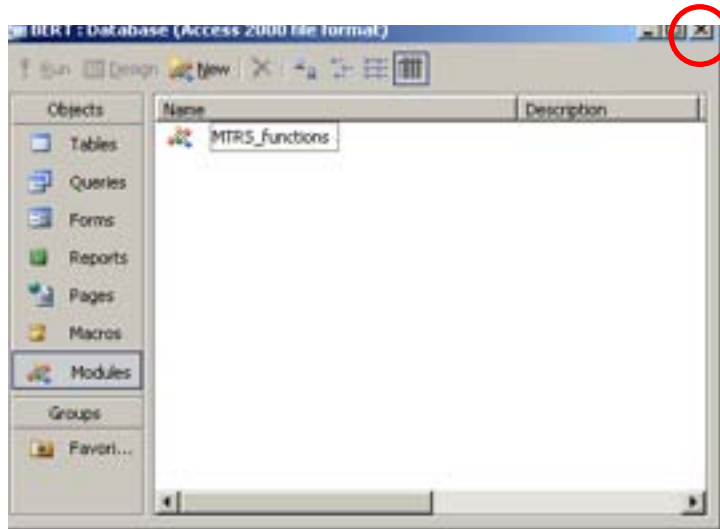
For Pre-Access 2007 users

1) Click the circle on the upper left corner of the screen.
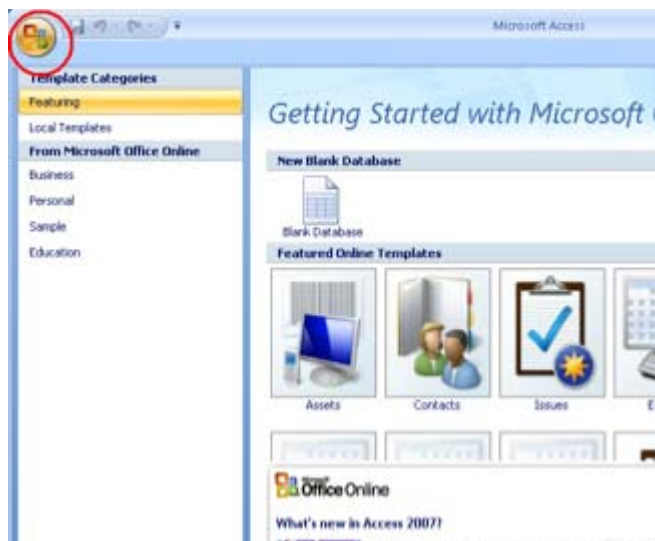
2) Once this menu has opened, click on **Access Options** at the bottom.
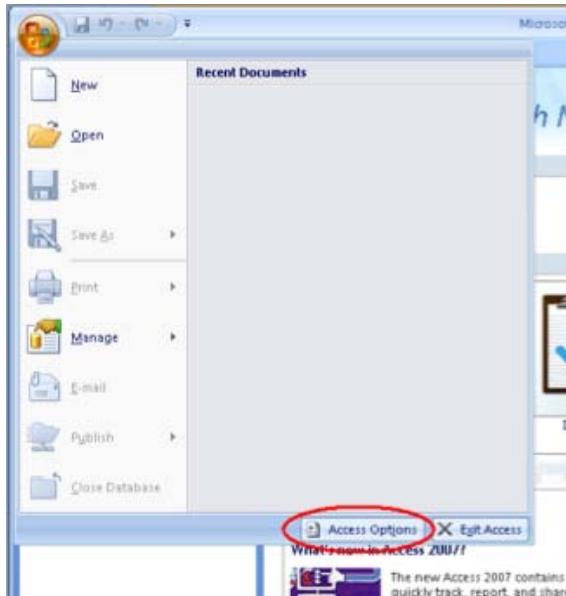
3) In **Access Options,** you will find an option called **Advanced** in the left margin. Click this option.
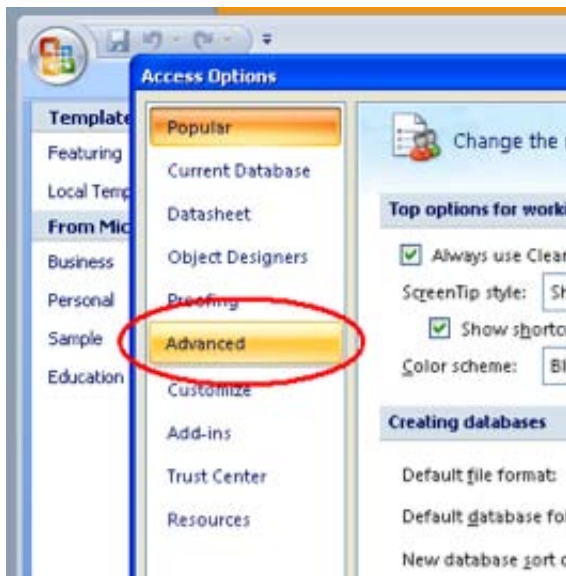
4) In **Advanced,** scroll down to find the section called **Confirm.** Within this section, you will see Record Changes, Document Deletions and Action Queries. Please make sure that these three boxes are empty and **NOT** checked.
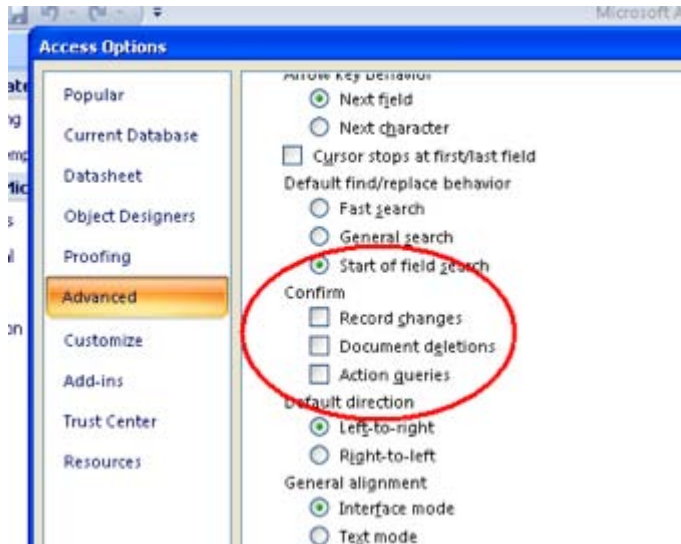
5) Please press **OK** at the bottom of the screen, and exit out of Access completely. When you re-open BERT, the unnecessary pop-up messages will no longer appear.

PART 2

Assembling data and creating reports

The Main screen

The Main screen has four sections:

1) the record base,

2) the search box,

3) the running totals display, and

4) the action buttons.

1 The record base

When BERT is initially installed, no records will display on the screen. After you have entered your records into BERT, they will appear alphabetically by last name on the Main screen. To access a particular record, click on either the name or SSN and the File Changes screen will appear showing that record's details.

2 The search box

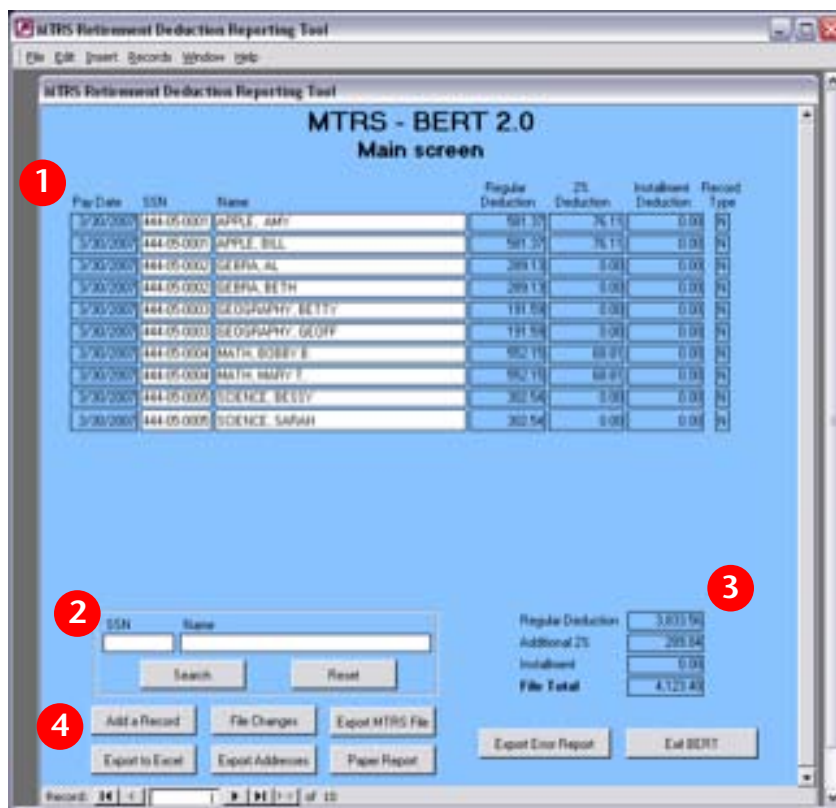The search box enables you to search for a particular record by either SSN or name. After a search is complete, the Main screen will display only the records found during the search. **You must hit the reset button in order to view all of the records again.**

User tip: Search

It is not necessary to differentiate between first and last name during a name search. If a string of characters is entered into the name search box, BERT will search the database for the occurrence of that string as both a first name or a last name.

3 The running totals display

This provides you with deduction totals in the various categories and the grand total for the file. These totals are updated whenever a record is revised.

Note: If you perform a search, these fields will display the total(s) for the record(s) displayed as a result of your search. For example, if you search for "Smith," and the window shows the records for five Smiths, the running totals display fields will display the totals for the five Smith records. **You must hit the reset button in order to view all of the records again.**

4 The action buttons

The main menu screen has eight action buttons that initiate all of the application's functions:

■ **Add record**	Opens the record modification screen in "add" mode allowing the user to add records
■ **File Changes** formerly Refresh database	Opens the File Changes screen
■ **Export MTRS file** formerly Export to text file	Creates the monthly MTRS report output to be saved on a diskette or CD

■ **Export to Excel**   Exports a file to an Excel spreadsheet to
formerly   facilitate analysis
Export to Excel file

■ **Export error report**   Runs current deduction file data through an
NEW feature   error detection process and generates an easy-
                   to-use report that identifies the most common
                   errors so that you can review and correct them
                   BEFORE you submit your deduction report
                   to the MTRS

■ **Export addresses**   Exports a list of names and addresses from
NEW feature   BERT for your convenience and use simply as
                   a mailing list or for other purposes

■ **Paper report**   Creates report output that can be printed and
formerly   saved in a district's records
Report

■ **Exit BERT**   Closes the application and exits Access
formerly Exit

For detailed descriptions of these functions, please refer to the particular
sections of this manual that follow.

Creating a file without importing data

To create a file manually ("from scratch") without importing any data, click the **Add a record** button at the bottom of the Main screen. This will open the Edit record screen where you can input your employee records. Repeat this step for each record.

Note
All fields on the Edit record screen must be completed before a record can be successfully saved.

Using the File Changes screen
to modify or create a file

The **File Changes** screen allows you to update, delete or create a set of records globally in a single operation rather than individually. You can populate the database with either a text file obtained from the MTRS or a locally-saved text file created for a previous reporting period.
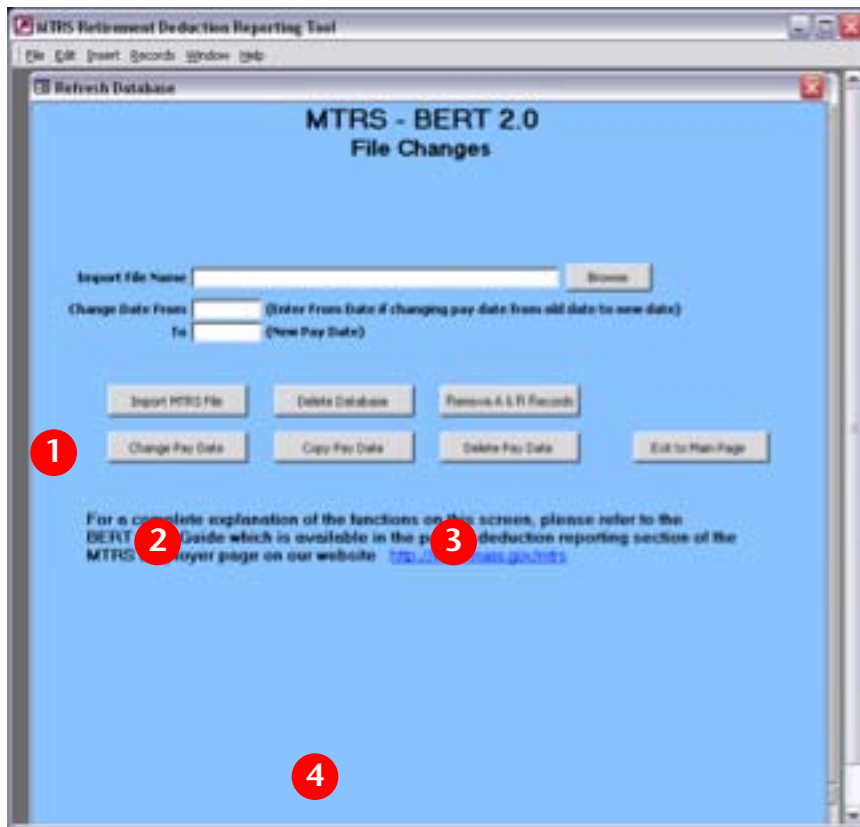
Note
Only text records can be imported into BERT. If you have a file that needs to be converted to a text file, open it in MS Wordpad, and use the *Save as* function to save the file on your computer as a text file.

These functions allow you to update, delete or create a set of records globally in a single operation rather than one by one.

■ **Import entire MTRS file** formerly Import entire file	Allows you to import an MTRS format-compliant text file to populate the BERT database. **When you import a file you will overwrite any previously existing records in your database.** This is the primary method that you will use to make corrections to an existing file.

■ **Delete database** NEW feature	Deletes all of the records in BERT
■ **Remove A&R records**	Deletes all of the adjustment and retroactive records from BERT while keeping all of the normal records intact
■ **Change pay date**	Enables you to globally change the pay date for all records with a given pay date. For example, if you imported a September file as the basis of an October report, this function allows you to globally change the September pay date(s) to the corresponding October pay date(s) in one step. **Note** Be sure to populate both the *Change Date From* and *To* fields with dates. Also, if a file has a separate record for each pay date in a month, each date must be changed, added or deleted for each pay date.
■ **Copy pay date**	Allows you to globally update your file by copying an existing pay date to create an additional pay date in a file. This is a useful tool for a district that uses BERT as a primary reporting tool and regularly reports multiple pay dates in a file. **Note** Be sure to populate both the *Change Date From* and *To* fields with dates.
■ **Delete pay date**	Allows you to globally delete all records with a certain pay date when creating a report for a two-pay period month when the previous report was for a three-pay period month. **Note** Be sure to enter the existing date that you want to delete in the *Change Date From* field.
■ **Exit to Main page**	Select this button to return to the Main screen.

Adding, modifying and deleting individual records

The **Edit record** screen gives you the ability to add, change and delete individual records in the database. This screen also displays all of the details contained in a member's record.

The **Edit record** screen has six sections:

1) record identification data,

2) earnings data,

3) rate and deduction data,

4) contract data,

5) member address information, and

6) action buttons.

Note
ALL of the fields on this screen must be completed before a record can be successfully saved.

1 Record identification data

This group of fields at the top of a record contains the district's four-digit MTRS identification number, the member's name, the member's SSN, the record type, the reporting period and pay dates.

2 Earnings data

The MTRS requires earnings to be reported in six eligible earnings categories. An additional category called Ineligible earnings is provided to report any earnings the member receives in the period that are not considered pensionable. If a payment matches the description of more than one earnings type, you should choose a category that most closely corresponds to the type of pay being reported. For example, if a teacher is paid a stipend for coaching, those earnings should be reported as *coaching* earnings rather than a *stipend*.

3 Rate and deduction data

A member may have only one of six deduction **rates**:

- 11%
- 9% plus 2% on earnings over $30,000
- 8% plus 2% on earnings over $30,000
- 7% plus 2% on earnings over $30,000
- 7% or
- 5%.

The deduction rate is based on:

- the employee's RetirementPlus status, which may be mandatory or elective based on the employee's membership date in the MTRS (Table 1), and,
- if the employee is not participating in RetirementPlus, his or her membership date in a Massachusetts public retirement system (Table 2).

Table 1

MTRS membership date	Deduction rate
On or after 7/1/2001	
■ Employees new to MTRS and Massachusetts public employment (no prior service with a Massachusetts public employer)	11% (mandatory enrollment in RetirementPlus at the RetirementPlus rate of 11%)
■ Employees who transfer into the MTRS from another Massachusetts public retirement system and who either *fail to elect* into the RetirementPlus program or *elect not to* participate in RetirementPlus	Deduction rate with the previous system (i.e., rate based on most recent date of membership in a Massachusetts public retirement system; see Table 2, below)
Prior to 7/1/2001	
Members of the MTRS (or Boston Retirement System) who, as of 7/1/2001, elected:	
■ to **participate** in RetirementPlus	11% (the RetirementPlus rate)
■ **not** to participate in RetirementPlus	Existing deduction rate as of 7/1/2001 (i.e., rate based on most recent date of membership in a Massachusetts public retirement system; see Table 2, below)

Table 2

Most recent date of membership in a Massachusetts retirement system   **Deduction rate**

Most recent date of membership in a Massachusetts retirement system	Deduction rate
Between 7/1/1996 and 6/30/2001	9% plus 2% on earnings over $30,000
Between 1/1/1984 and 6/30/1996	8% plus 2% on earnings over $30,000
Between 1/1/1979 and 12/31/1983	7% plus 2% on earnings over $30,000
Between 1/1/1975 and 12/31/1978	7%
Prior to 1/1/1975	5%

Deductions are of three **types**:

- regular deductions,

- 2% deductions, and

- installment payments. [Note: We do not currently accept deductions in the installment payment field. This field is reserved for future use.]

4 Contract data

This data is used to validate salary information and associate reported earnings with creditable service.

FTE annual salary	The annual contractual salary should be listed as the full-time equivalent for part-time members. This is the base salary derived from the member's contract or pay schedule in the collective bargaining agreement. The annual salary does not include any additional types of pay such as coaching pay, stipends or longevity bonus.
Full-time/pt%	The full-time status must be listed as a whole number percentage, not as a decimal. For example, a half-time teacher would be coded as 50, not .5, 50% or .50.

■ **Position code**	There are 15 valid MTRS position codes: ☐ SUPT . . . . . . Superintendent ☐ TEACH . . . . Teacher ☐ COACH . . . Coach ☐ ADMIN . . . Administrator ☐ PRIN . . . . . . Principal ☐ NURSE . . . . Nurse ☐ OTHER . . . . Used in rare cases where a member's position is not available ☐ LTS . . . . Long-term substitute ☐ PSYCH . . . . Psychiatrist or psychologist ☐ LIBRA . . . . . Librarian ☐ ASPRIN . . . Assistant Principal ☐ ASUPT . . . . Assistant Superintendent ☐ GUIDE . . . . Guidance counselor ☐ OT . . . . Occupational therapist ☐ PT . . . . Physical therapist
■ **Contract term**	The number of months that a member must work to earn his or her base annual salary. The typical teacher is contractually required to work 10 months (September–June); therefore, one month equals 1/10 of a year of service credit.
■ **Pay frequency**	The schedule on which a member is paid. For example, a member paid bi-weekly over 12 months would have a pay frequency of 26 because that is the number of pay dates in the contract year.
■ **Pay duration**	The number of months over which the base salary is paid. For example, a member paid from September through August would be assigned a pay duration factor of 12, and someone who receives his or her summer month's salary in a lump-sum payment in June would be listed as LS.

5 Member address info

The member's home mailing address is required on your MTRS report.

Note: Be sure to update your BERT **and** payroll databases when an employee reports an address change.

6 Action buttons

These buttons are used to **Save and validate** the record**, Delete** the record, or to **Close without validation,** which means to close the record without validating the input.

Additional requirements for retroactive and adjustment records

■ **Retroactive** payments made to members must be reported in the **Retro Earnings** field. If the member is retired or no longer employed in your district, you can create a **Retro** record.

Note: The **Report month** for a retroactive record should reflect the first month in the span of time that the retroactive payment covers.

■ When an **Adjustment** is made to an individual's record, it should be reported as an **Adjustment** record *separate* from the normal deduction record. This type of record is used to report an adjustment to base pay. For example, an adjustment record might be necessary when an unpaid sick day requires the user to create a negative entry to adjust the base pay received for one payroll.

Note: The **Report month** for an adjustment record must match the month of the transaction being corrected. If the correction is for pay covering more than one period, it must reflect the first month that the adjustment is correcting.

PART 3

Exporting data and reports

BERT allows you to export your data in five different reports:

■ an error report (data quality test for your reference and use),

■ the monthly MTRS retirement deduction report,

■ a paper report (export file to printer),

■ an export to Microsoft Excel for analysis, and

■ a name and address list (for your convenience and use).

Export an error report

BERT now enables you to test your data for the most common data quality issues before sending the file to the MTRS.

To export an error report, go to the Main screen and click on the **Export error report** button. Once the browser appears, simply name the file, choose where you want to save it, and click **Save**. We recommend that you save the error report file to your desktop so that you can access it quickly.

After you have reviewed the report and corrected the errors in BERT, you can discard the original error report by dragging it to your recycle bin, and then run another error report. Repeat this process until you have no errors. BERT will not catch every error, but it will catch the most common ones.

Below is a list of the possible error report messages you may see and what they indicate.

Error message	What this means
Agency code is invalid	The four-digit Agency code field is blank
Transaction date is invalid	The member's transaction date is blank
Pay period is not valid	The period date field is blank

Error message	What this means
SSN is invalid	The member's Social Security number is null or one of several designated false SSNs
Name field is blank	There is no data in the name field
Street address is blank	The member's street address field in the address is blank
City field is blank	The city field of the member's address is blank
State field is blank	The member's state field in the address is blank
Zip code is invalid	The member's zip code field in the address is blank
Eligible earnings without a deduction	Eligible earnings were reported but no deduction was reported
Record has no earnings or deduction	The earnings and deduction fields are all zero
Deduction without eligible earnings	A deduction has been taken without eligible earnings being reported
Rate code is invalid	The member's rate code is not one of these acceptable values: 05, 07, 08, 09 or 11
Regular deduction is invalid	The regular deduction field is blank or negative
Deduction does not match eligible earnings	The regular deduction amount does not calculate properly against the eligible earnings
2% Deduction is invalid	The value in the 2% field is either blank or negative
2% Deduction is missing	This error will appear for any 8% or 9% member that is listed as full-time with a salary of more than $30,000 but yet did not have a 2% deduction taken
2% Deduction taken in error	This error will appear for any 5% or 11% member who had 2% deduction taken
Installment payment is invalid	The installment field is blank or any value other than zero
Annual salary is invalid	The annual salary is blank, zero or negative

Error message	What this means
Position code is invalid	The position code is not one of these acceptable values: TEACH, ADMIN, OTHER, COACH, PRIN, NURSE, SUPT, LTS, PSYCH, ASPRIN, LIBRA, GUIDE, OT, PT or ASUPT
Full-time percentage is not valid	The full-time status is null or a value of less than 002 or more than 100 has been reported
Contract term is invalid	The contract term field is blank or a value other than 01, 02, 03, 09, 10, 11 or 12 has been detected
Pay frequency is invalid	The pay frequency is not one of these acceptable values: 01, 02, 03, 10, 12, 20, 21, 22, 24, 26, 27, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 52 or 53
Pay duration is invalid	The pay duration field is blank or a value other than 01, 02, 03, 09, 10, 11, 12 or LS has been detected
Pay duration and pay frequency are not compatible	The combination of pay duration and pay frequency value being reported is not possible
Pay duration cannot be shorter than the contract term	Member is listed as working more months than he or she is paid

Reminder
The MTRS recommends that you keep electronic copies of your deduction reports for **at least 24 months** in the event that we—or you—find that the data needs to be reevaluated or reproduced.

User tip
In order to make it easy to identify files in the future, you may want to adopt a standard naming convention, such as your district's four-digit agency code followed by the month (mm) and year (yy) of the report.

For example, the filename for Abington Public Schools' December 2007 report would be 01001207.

Export to the monthly MTRS deduction report

To export your MTRS database to a file compliant with MTRS reporting requirements, click the **Export MTRS file** button on the Main screen (see page 11). A **Save as…** interface will appear which will allow you to name the text file and select where to save it. Below is an example of a file being saved as 9999-0307 (district 9999's March 2007 report) on a local drive labeled (**H:).**
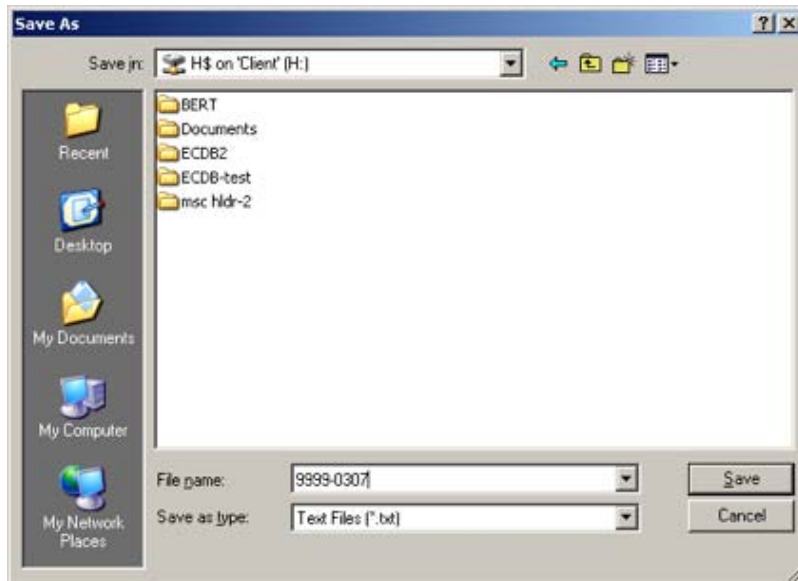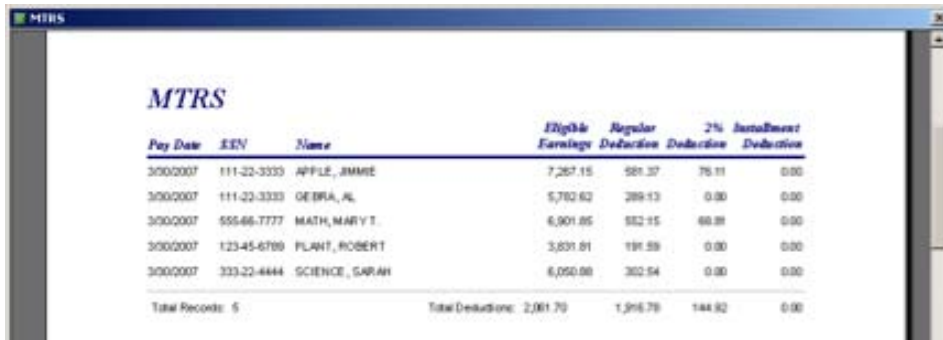

Export to a paper report

BERT also has the ability to create a paper report (a "hard copy") that can be sorted by Social Security number, name or pay date. **You are not required to send the paper report to the MTRS with your diskette or CD**.

To create a paper report, click the **Paper report** button on the Main screen (see page 11). A screen will appear in which you may then choose to create a report sorted by SSN, name or pay date; or, you may use the **Close** button to close the window and return to the Main screen without creating a report.

Once the report screen appears, you can print it by holding the **Ctrl** key and pressing the **P** key, or you can save it to the directory of your choice by holding the **Ctrl** key and pressing the **S** key.

An example of a paper report sorted by SSN.

Export to Excel

BERT also allows you to export financial data to a file in Microsoft Excel where it can be more easily viewed and manipulated.

To use this feature, click the **Export to Excel** button on the Main screen (see page 11). A **Save as** screen will appear that will allow you to name the text file and designate where to save it, just as in the earlier illustration for exporting the MTRS file.

Export an address list

This version of BERT has a new feature that allows you to export a list of names and addresses of all employees in the file.

To use this feature, in the Main screen, click the **Export address list** button. A **Save as** screen will appear that will allow you to name the text file and choose where you want to save it, just as in the earlier illustration for exporting the MTRS file.

Questions and
technical assistance

If you have any problems installing BERT, or if you have any questions
about using the program, please:

- contact your MTRS Employer Services Representative,

- call the Employer Services helpline at 617-679-6895, or

- send an e-mail to **bertsupport@trb.state.ma.us.**

For a list of assigned representatives or other employer education
materials, please visit us online at **mass.gov/mtrs** > **Employers.**